



News From The ...

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Committee Explores Mental Health Treatment Incentives

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs heard testimony concerning the apparent disconnect between Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) mental health programs and disability compensation in helping veterans heal from the invisible wounds of war. Witnesses were called to bring forth a diversity of suggestions to better assist veterans seeking mental health treatment, while examining the coordination of that treatment between the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) towards a goal of recovery and wellness.

"I felt ashamed of needing help, especially when there were others more deserving. Plus, why would I get help when my VA checks went straight into the bank. At the VA, I was another number in a revolving door," stated Daniel Hanson, a Marine Corps veteran, before the Committee. "At the program I checked myself into, Minnesota Team Challenge, I was a person and they wanted to see me get better."

Hanson served in Iraq where his unit lost 35 Marines. When he returned home, he began to experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, heightened by the suicide of close friends and his brother, also a Marine. Hanson turned to VA for help, but found no incentive in receiving outpatient treatment. He checked himself into a full-time private, inpatient facility in Minnesota, where he spent 15 months. Today, he is married, has children, and works as an advocate for fellow veterans suffering from mental trauma.

The Committee is currently exploring the concept of a holistic approach to mental health treatment at VA, incorporating incentives, family support counseling, and education and employment benefits customized to each veteran's needs.

"On one hand, we have a medical system that boasts of evidence-based therapies, improved access, and high quality of care. On the other, we have data from VA indicating that veterans with mental illness only get progressively worse. There is something very wrong with this situation," stated Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. "We need to move beyond numbers that simply tell us how many veterans use the system and get at the fundamental question of whether they are on a road to leading full, productive lives. It is our duty at this Committee to ask these tough questions and find solutions."

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